THE BEATING OF HARIDAS THAKURA

from *Sri Chaitanya-Bhagavata, Adi-lila* Chapter 16

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CAST: Haridas Thakura, 2 Hindus, 2 Guards, Narrator, 2 Muslims, Kazi.

Narrator: About 500 years ago, during the time of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, lived a great saint and devotee named Haridas Thakura. Haridas is known as the *Namacharya*, which means the one who taught the chanting of the Holy Name of the Lord by his personal example. He used to chant at least 300,000 Holy Names every day, in his ecstasy of devotional service. While chanting, he sometimes manifested extraordinary symptoms by laughing, crying, rolling on the ground or falling into trance. In this way, Haridas showed by his own pure example that the chanting of the name of Krishna is the highest pleasure of all. Sometimes it is seen that such a great devotee is put to a severe test by Krishna Himself, just to show the whole world that the pure devotee is forever situated in a transcendental position, beyond the miseries of the material world. This play tells about one such test, which established beyond any doubt the greatness of Haridas Thakura.

SCENE ONE

(Haridas is sitting by the side of the road, chanting loudly with great pleasure. Then several Muslims approach)

Muslim 1: Just see this man here! I happen to know that he is Muslim by birth, but due to poor association he is trying to imitate the Hindus. He is a disgrace to his Muslim ancestry!

Muslim 2: Not only that, my dear brother, but he is trying to persuade other Muslims to adopt the same degraded Vaishnava practices!

Muslim 1: No!

Muslim 2: Yes, it's true. Why, just the other day in Navadvipa I saw him and one of those other fanatics, Nityananda, going door to door asking people to chant the names of their God!

Muslim 1: This is outrageous! Who knows what effect this could have on the entire Muslim community if this Haridas is allowed to carry on in this way?

Muslim 2: Why don't we approach our Muslim city official? I'm sure that when he hears about this situation, he will put a stop to this Haridas and his chanting.

Muslim 1: Excellent idea, friend. Come, let's go immediately! **(they exit while**

Haridas continues chanting, Then two *smarta brahmanas* enter talking. They become disturbed when they see Haridas)

Hindu 1: O best of the *smarta brahmanas,* just see this heretic. Without any consideration for the complex rules and regulations of the Vedas, this shameless man is bent on bringing our noble religion down into the filthy streets. This makes a mockery of the Vedic ritualistic ceremonies! This will ruin Hinduism!

Hindu 2: Not only that, but this man is a *mleccha,* a meat-eating Muslim from birth. Unlike ourselves, being born of pure *brahmana* parents, this imitator of brahminical culture was born of parents who are fond of eating the flesh of the sacred cow!

Hindu 1: If this low-born man is allowed to go on like this, people may get the wrong idea. They may believe that religion in this age is a simple matter of chanting Hare Krishna! Thus they will do away with the complicated Vedic rituals, which only caste *brahmanas* like ourselves can really understand. Thus we will lose our social prestige!

Hindu 2: This is true, my fellow *brahmana.* Why, if we don't stop this character immediately... who knows? The whole world might follow his example and become Krishna conscious! Then they will no longer call on specialists like ourselves to perform the elaborate sacrifices and ceremonies mentioned in the Vedas. Ordinarily, the common men have very little knowledge of these religious performances. They are not trained in chanting the Vedic *mantras* with the proper pronunciation and meter as we are. Therefore, they call upon us to conduct such sacrifices, marriages and offerings to the ancestors. After we come and put on a nice colorful show of elaborate ritual they pay us handsomely! If the chanting of simpler *mantras* becomes popular, people will give up those big sacrifices and pompous rituals, and simply hold sing-a-longs! If Haridas isn't stopped, he'll ruin the livelihood of all the professional *brahmanas* like us!

Hindu 1: **(aghast)** What a dreadful thought! What can we do?

Hindu 2: I think we should go immediately to the city magistrate and complain to him. Perhaps he'll put a stop to this before it's to late.

Hindu 1: Good idea! He is a Muslim, and ordinarily he wouldn't be so inclined to help us out since we are Hindus. But I think we can color our story in such a way that he too becomes alarmed about the activities of this Haridas. Listen, as I explain: what if we told the Kazi... **(becomes inaudible as they move off stage. Haridas continues chanting throughout, and when they are gone, he leaps to his feet and cries out loudly:)**

Haridas: *Hare Krishna!* In any circumstance of life, whether in happiness or distress, simply chant the Holy Name of the Lord, and take shelter of his

Lotus Feet. Krishna promises to give His devotees all protection, so you need not fear! **(he leaves stage chanting loudly)**

SCENE TWO

(The Kazi, the Muslim ruler, is sitting on a throne. Guards are standing on both sides, holding long spears. Muslims and Hindus are standing nearby. They are concluding their conversation with the Kazi)

Hindu 1: So, your honor, in conclusion we feel that if this Haridas is allowed to go on unchecked, he will gradually gain enough followers, not only to disrupt the religious balance in your district, but eventually to organize a political party to oppose your rule! We are convinced that this is his secret motive. So, you would do well to take steps to stop him now before he becomes too strong! **(turns and looks at the other Hindu, with conspiratorial smirk on his face. The Kazi, who looks as though he has been listening to many long complaints from both groups, perks up suddenly, when he of hears of this plot against him. He looks about nervously)**

Kazi: Thank you, gentlemen, and also you **(to the Muslims)** for bringing this serious situation to my attention! I assure you that I will act without delay! **(they all exit, and Kazi sits in a reflective mood)** It seems that there may be more to this Haridas business than I thought at first. When the Muslims and Hindus first complained, I thought it was just some petty jealousy. Their charges that this Haridas is ruining their religion are mostly nonsense, of course. They themselves are the real cause of their own ruination. Especially those caste *brahmanas.* They would do anything to maintain their false prestige, and especially their income! **(chuckles in a bitter or derogatory way)** And those Muslims can't be trusted very far, either! **(sits up and becomes more serious)**

But this suggestion that the whole thing might be a false cover for a political uprising can't be dismissed so lightly! It could just be that this person Haridas is simply pretending this religious fervor of chanting Hare Krishna, and that his real intent is to ultimately take over the government. Of course, it seems unlikely; his chanting is harmless in itself, and some people even claim that he is a saint. Nevertheless... **(trails off, Kazi is lost in thought for a moment, then barks abruptly)** Guards! **(two guards enter)** Go out and arrest this man they call Haridas Thakura, and bring him here at once! **(as they exit hurriedly, Kazi settles back in a grim mood)**

SCENE THREE

(Kazi is seated as before, reading and signing some papers. Just then the guards enter, dragging Haridas. The Kazi stands up, and they throw Haridas as his feet. Haridas is chanting loudly)

Guard 1: This is the one they call Haridas, your excellency.

Kazi: Well, get up, man! **(Haridas slowly gets to his feet, chanting softly, as Kazi walks around him slowly)** So, you are the cause of

all these complaints, eh? Your name is Haridas?

Haridas: That is correct, sir.

Kazi: Well, Haridas, I may inform you that you are causing quite a disturbance in my district with your religious antics.

Haridas: I'm afraid I don't understand, sir.

Kazi: I'm talking about this chanting of yours. I've been told that you're walking here and there in my district, shouting the names of the Hindu God, at the top of your lungs. Not only that, but people say that you sometimes make a spectacle of yourself by falling on the ground, crying, laughing, rolling in the dust and drooling. Is this true?

Haridas: If people say this about me, sir, it must be so.

Kazi: **(raising his voice)** Well, it's getting on peoples' nerves! **(abruptly calms down)** I know that you were born and raised in a nice Muslim family. Tell me — why have you abandoned your own true religion to take up this nonsense Hindu chanting?

Haridas: Actually, sir, there is no question of abandoning religion, for real religion is an eternal function of every living entity. We may call ourselves Muslims or Hindus as a matter of social convenience, but the fact is that we are all eternal servants of the Almighty God, who is the Father of everyone. He can be called by so many names, like Allah, Krishna, Rama and Hari — but by whatever name He is known, He remains the same Supreme Person. And the best method of worshiping Him in this age is by the loud and incessant chanting of His Holy Names!

Kazi: Why does it have to be loud? Why can't you just say some quiet prayers or something?

Haridas: Whoever hears the Holy Name of Lord is benefited. Loud chanting of Hare Krishna, therefore, benefits not only the human beings, but also the trees, plants, insects and all other living beings. One should therefore not be disturbed by the loud chanting of Hare Krishna, for it is beneficial not only to the chanter but to everyone who gets an opportunity to hear.

Kazi: **(irritated)** All right, all right! Let me get to the point. Both the Hindus and the Muslims in my district are angry about this chanting of yours. Obviously they don't want it going on around here, and my duty as the magistrate is to satisfy these citizens. Therefore, I order you to stop this practice of chanting at once, and return peacefully to your own Muslim traditions.

Haridas: I'm very sorry, sir, but I cannot comply with your order.

Kazi: Why not? I have nothing against you, Haridas. You appear sincere and full of good intentions. I have no wish to punish you — but I cannot tolerate insubordination! Why won't you obey me?

Haridas: I have no desire to be disrespectful, sir. You are an authority, but you are not the highest authority. Ordinarily, your orders should be obeyed by everyone, for you are a government officer. But if you attempt to stop the devotional service of the Lord, your order should be rejected at once, just as one rejects the orders of a madman in the street who thinks that he has become the king!

Kazi: Very well, Haridas. I can now see that my suspicions were justified. Your plan is undoubtedly to teach the same rebellious attitude to others, and ultimately to create a situation of anarchy. You have become so crazed by this constant chanting that you can ignore the government and violate the law in any way you please, without fear of punishment. And if others are misled in a similar way, the people will all become lawless and our orderly society will be ruined. Well, this nonsense has gone on long enough. If you do not cease these actions at once, I will punish you in such a way that people will remember it for a long, long time. So now will you stop?

Haridas: It is not that I have become lawless, sir, but I am obeying a higher law than yours. That is the Law of the Supreme Lord, which is so great and stern that it makes your laws look petty and inconsequential by comparison. Everyone must obey the Supreme Law, willingly or unwillingly. And if I obey the order of the Supreme Lord, I have nothing to fear from your punishment. You may cut this body into pieces, or tear it limb from limb but I will never stop chanting the Holy Name of Hari!

Kazi: **(explodes)** Fool! **(slaps Haridas)** Guards, take this man to the market place of the city and beat him with canes until he's dead! If he doesn't die in the first market place, drag him to another and another and another and beat him until the life leaves his body! **(guards grab Haridas roughly and push him out the door, Kazi turns and falls down in seat)**

SCENE FOUR

(Guards drag Haridas through the market place. Several men beat him while the *brahmanas* and Muslims goad them on)

Hindus/Muslims: Beat him! Kill him! Break every bone in his body! **(guards beat Haridas with violent enthusiasm, but his chanting continues, and he is seen smiling and unaffected)**

Guard 1: Let's drag him to the next market!

Guard 2: Yeah! Drag him away! **(they drag Haridas behind screen, and then out again. Then they beat him repeatedly. The Hindus and Muslims are shouting encouragements as before)**

Guard 1: Let's drag him to the next market! **(other guards agree as before, and they drag him out. Pause, then they come back in, clearly**

exhausted now, as though they had passed through many markets)

Guard 2: I can't go on beating him anymore. I'm going to pass out from exhaustion!

Guard 1: He should have died in the first market place. But this is the 22nd marketplace! I can't go on either. This is crazy!

Guard 2: Not only is he still alive, but he's never stopped chanting, and he's even been smiling the whole time! This guy's not human! **(to Haridas)** Haridas, if you don't die, the Kazi will cut off our heads!

Haridas: **(to himself)** Oh, no! Just see how inconsiderate I am! Here I am blissfully chanting Hare Krishna while these men are laboriously trying to kill me! Because Krishna is protecting me, they are unable to destroy me, and consequently they are in anxiety. Since we should not cause anxiety to any living being, I will assume a state of trance and thus free them from this labor. **(Haridas becomes stiff in *samadhi*)**

Guard 1: Look! It seems that Haridas has died after all. We're safe from the Kazi's wrath!

Guard 2: Let's carry him back to the Kazi to prove that we've done our work.

Guard 1: He looks stiff. *Rigor mortis* must have set in. **(they try to lift him but cannot)**

Guard 2: Allah! He feels as heavy as a mountain! I can't budge him!

Guard 1: What kind of spirit has possessed this body? This must be some sort of supernatural power. Now what are we going to do?

Guard 2: Wait! He's no longer heavy now. This is very strange! Grab his feet and let's go! **(Haridas is stiff as a board. One lifts head and one lifts feet. They carry him out)**

SCENE FIVE

(The Kazi is sitting in a chair, staring out into space, when the guards come in carrying Haridas)

Kazi: **(startled, almost jumps out of seat)** What, what do you want?!

Guard 1: We've brought the body of Haridas to show you that he's dead. **(they lay him down)**

Kazi: Dead?! Haridas is dead? Oh, so he is! **(slightly startled to see that he is)** Very good, guards! Very good! Well done. Hmmm, it seems that his God couldn't save him after all.

Guard 2: What should we do with the body?

Kazi: What do you do with the beggar's body? Throw it in the river!

Guard 2: Yes, sir. **(both guards pick Haridas up and carry him off. Kazi sits down nervously. Guards bring Haridas out to throw him in the river)**

Guard 1: Good-bye, Haridas, nice knowing you!

Guard 2: He's heavy, he'll probably sink right to the bottom. **(they pitch him into the river)**

Guard 1: Hey, look! He's floating!

Guard 2: Let's get out of here, it's too weird! **(Guards leave hurriedly and Haridas slowly returns to external consciousness)**

Haridas: Now that they're gone, let me return to my chanting. **(he swims to shore. Later, a guard calls out)**

Guard 1: Make way for the Kazi!

Kazi: Well, it appears that everything is going on nicely in the village again since we got rid of that nuisance, Haridas.

Guard 1: Ahhh! **(screams, then speaks in a frenzied voice)** Look, look! A dead man walking! **(he turns and runs out in terror)**

Guard 2: Everyone get your clubs, drive this ghost away! **(Haridas walks on, chanting in ecstasy)**

Kazi: Wait! Hold your weapons. This is no evil spirit, but a divine personality, who is fully under the protect of God. **(he offers *dandavats* at Haridas's lotus feet)** Haridas, I am the greatest offender at your holy feet, please forgive my unlimited offenses!

Haridas: My dear sir! You have not made any offense. If there is any offense at all, it was on my part. If I were very pure, everyone would immediately take up this chanting and become happy. But, due to my sinful nature, people become insulted by my offensive chanting. Instead of being attracted, they become angry. I am so sinful that I deserve to suffer in hell for millions of years; but by the mercy of the Holy Name, I have been spared and given a little beating instead. **(he looks compassionately at the Kazi, who is still at his feet)** Anyway, I am glad to see that you are beginning to understand the power of this chanting. You were so afraid I might overthrow your position that you wanted to kill me. Actually, it is not me you should fear, but rather this material world, which imposes death upon everyone. This chanting of

the Holy Name is the only means of deliverance in this age. So, give up your envy and fearfulness. All troubles will be gone when you chant the Holy Names of the Lord:

HARE KRISHNA HARE KRISHNA, KRISHNA KRISHNA HARE HARE
HARE RAMA HARE RAMA, RAMA RAMA HARE RAMA

This is most easily done by singing them loudly in the streets, in the temple or at home. Let's all sing it right now! ***(kirtan)***

The End